

NAILING BUSINESS



By Amy (Kean) VerSteeg '96, Editor

Young professional couple seeking lifestyle change leave successful careers to buy historic hometown hardware store during pandemic.

No, this is not the backstory of a new HGTV series. This is the true tale of how **Samantha (Meyer) Giesting '13** and her spouse, Allen, became co-owners of Dunlap Supply in Batesville, Indiana.

Samantha, a former high school English teacher, said they never imagined becoming hardware store owners, but a series of unimaginable events brought them “the opportunity of a lifetime.” Now, they’re running the small business with big ambitions.

Their lives began to change in 2016 when Allen, then owner and operator of a thriving landscape business, was diagnosed with Lyme disease. He was 25 years old.

“Allen got very, very sick, but we found an amazing doctor that helped him with extensive treatment, that he’ll continue for at least two more years,” Samantha said.

With Allen’s progress came more unexpected news.

Allen Giesting holds daughter Calla. His spouse, Samantha (Meyer) '13, holds daughter Heidi. Daughter Emmy stands.

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“The doctor suggested for his health’s sake that he consider another career, one that didn’t involve working long hours, outdoors.”

Around the same time, they learned of a hardware store in their hometown that was for sale. Allen jokingly asked if Samantha wanted to buy it.

“But, his landscape business was booming, and there was no slowing down in sight. We didn’t think we could walk away,” Samantha recalled.

She concurrently was facing career challenges as a teacher within a school system where administrators and parents were at odds. When Allen brought up the hardware store, again, a couple of months later, Samantha decided there’d be no harm in investigating.

“I loved, and I mean loved, teaching, but it was almost impossible for me to sleep at night with all the turmoil at work. For the sake of Allen’s health and mine, I thought it was worth meeting with the store owners to learn more.”

The couple met the owners in February 2020. They learned the store was built in 1873, one of six in the Dunlap chain that operated across Indiana until the

early 1900s. The stores catered to contractors and construction crews. After the original owners experienced a family tragedy in the 1950s, some legal issues ensued and the chain of stores was divided and sold.

The Batesville location was purchased by a local man who continued operating it until its 100th anniversary in 1973, when he sold it to the Fullenkamp family, also local. They continued operating the store until 2020, when Samantha and Allen became the new owners.

“We really hit it off with the Fullenkamps, and we loved learning their family history and the history of the store,” said Samantha. The former owner recently turned 90, and his children, now in their 50s and 60s, all worked in the store and helped run it, she added.

In March 2020, as the couple were in the throes of transitioning from their careers and stepping up to take the reins at the store, the pandemic erupted. Plans halted when several of the government offices they needed information from regarding the store were inaccessible or had limited staffing. On top of that, their full-time career obligations persisted.

“I resigned myself to accepting that owning the store was not a sealed deal, and I was scared,” Samantha said. “I was e-teaching from home while taking care of our three daughters (Emmy, 5, Calla, 3, and Heidi, 8 months) and trying to get my ducks in a row to buy the business. Allen had to keep mowing and landscaping, and working his long hours. We were burning the candle at both ends. It was wild, but we made it through!”

They officially became the owners of Dunlap Supply on July 1, 2020.

“We’re dealing with a business climate that none of the former owners or employees has ever seen. During the pandemic, we’ve witnessed sawmills shut down, and prices spike from \$7 a board to \$40 overnight. And we’ve seen lead times on a patio door go from 12 days to 12 weeks.”

The situation with suppliers is slowly improving as the grip of the pandemic loosens, she said.

“Our saving grace is our loyal base of customers. People tell us that coming to the store is like coming to Mayberry, and it really is. The store causes us to slow down, in a good way. Allen and I now work side

by side every day, and it has brought us so much closer.”

Allen is the store manager, and he oversees purchasing and special orders. Samantha is the bookkeeper and payroll manager.

“We are not too proud to sweep the floors and wash the windows, either,” she said.

With so many people isolating at home during the pandemic, the store has customers frequently shopping for DIY supplies, like paint. Plus, the store has approximately 200 contractors on account, and averages 2,000 transactions per month.

“We are moving so much product each day it’s almost unreal,” Samantha said. “We even added a couple new members to our team. Some of the Fullenkamp ‘kids’ are working with us until we reach our one-year anniversary as owners.”

Samantha misses the interaction with her former students, but she is grateful for the new venture.

“It has been one of the best decisions of our lives,” she said. “This store built Batesville, literally. Its history — knowing it, embracing it, preserving it — is really important to Allen and me.” ■